

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Gender, War and Politics

The Wars of Revolution and Liberation
Transatlantic Comparisons, 1775–1820

17-19 MAY 2007

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Institute for Arts & Humanities  Hyde Hall

Aims and Agenda

No epoch between the Thirty Years' War and the First World War affected Europe and the Americas so lastingly as the war period 1775 and 1820. In these years the Transatlantic World confronted a more or less constant state of war. In particular, the French Revolutionary Wars and Napoleonic Wars soon touched not only every European country but also North and South America and the Caribbean Islands and profoundly shook them all. Because of their new character as 'revolutionary wars', 'national wars' or 'wars of liberation', which were increasingly fought by militia or conscripted troops and often were supported by volunteer units, these conflicts transformed the conduct of warfare. Inevitably, they deeply altered not only armies and their soldiers and officers but also civil societies –men and women alike. Well into the twentieth century, this era—which was also a period of far-reaching economic, social and political upheaval—has played a central role in academic scholarship, popular histories, and the historical politics of all the countries involved. Succeeding generations appear on the whole to have conceived of this period as the "founding era" of both "their" nations or regions and their collective identities. Therefore, a transatlantic comparison of the relations between war, politics and the gender order in this period calls out for a serious scholarly consideration that can illuminate fully its lasting impact. *The analysis of relations between war, politics and the gender order in the transformation period between 1775 and 1820 is the main of the conference.*

The history of warfare, too often understood as a realm of human activity that was naturally and exclusively masculine, has traditionally resisted a gendered analysis. Yet, as recent research indicates, war is one of the key sites through which societies have constructed and shaped gender identities. In particular during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, universal conscription or other forms of mass mobilization were introduced for the first time in several countries, establishing the willingness to fight and die for one's nation as a key attribute of masculinity, a capacity that was often linked to demands for, or promises of, political rights. The mobilization of men for war was accompanied by the intensive deployment of gender imagery that variously portrayed men as members of a fraternal military community, or as valorous defenders of family, home, and country. The creation of mass national armies, and the experience of war, invasion, and occupation were crucial to the construction of modern concepts of 'nationalism' and national identity. At the same time, the period of the wars of revolution and liberation witnessed the emergence of a hierarchical and complementary model of the gender order, which argued for the first time in terms of biological and even nascent anthropological models. As both gender difference and national difference became more rigidly defined, concepts of national identity and national difference increasingly drew on specific notions of masculinity and femininity. These notions in turn were constructed in relation to other categories of difference, in particular class, race, ethnicity and religion. Thus, this conference takes on a significant scholarly challenge: It will explore the relationship between the construction of modern concepts of gender and national identity and the experience of the wars of revolution and liberation, and then will compare those relationships within a trans-national framework.

Although military service during this period may have been classified as a masculine endeavor, there are several examples of cross-dressing female soldiers who fought during the wars of revolution and liberation. More significant, there is ample evidence of female participation in popular resistance, for example, against the British army in the American Revolutionary Wars and the Napoleonic army during the European wars of liberation. Women were furthermore informally attached to national armies as camp followers, army wives, suppliers of food, and nurses. With still greater impact, the state increasingly drew on civilian society to support the war effort. Women as well as men were mobilized in a range of roles, from forming patriotic associations to undertaking relief work. In the absence of male relatives, women became solely responsible for supporting their families and for carrying on family businesses and trades. These apparently paradoxical trends - the increasing elaboration of complementary and separate spheres of male and female activity, and the adoption by women of a range of public roles during this period - will form an important theme of the conference.

Because these phenomena were reshaped through the many representations they generated, the conference will furthermore examine the relationship between gender and the memory of these wars of revolution and liberation. Thereby the conference will consider how the gender ideals that were produced during this period influenced subsequent constructions of gender, and also will examine and compare shifting representations of masculinity and femininity, as well as male and female participation in the wars' memory and culture. Scholars have identified a gendering of commemoration during the nineteenth century, through which women increasingly became identified as custodians of national and communal memory, or embodiments of national tradition. Thus women's role in the preservation, construction, and transmission of memory, as mourners for their dead relatives, as the editors and authors of memoirs and biographies, or symbolic figures, will form a central strand of inquiry.

Format

The **3-day conference** will have eight panels with 3-4 speakers each. The presentations should not be longer than 25 minutes. Each panel will be introduced and moderated by a chair and commented on by a commentator who relates the papers to each other. The length of the comment should not exceed 10 minutes. The main focus of the conference will be on the discussion.

Conveners

- **The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill** (History Department, The College of Arts and Sciences, Carolina Center for Women, Curriculum in Women's Studies, Centre for European Studies, Center for Slavic, Eurasian and East European Studies, Institute for Arts & Humanities, Curriculum in Peace, War and Defense, Center for the Study of the American South, Curriculum in American Studies, Curriculum in International and Area Studies, Department of Music, Graduate School).
- **The German Historical Institute, Washington D.C.**
- **Duke University** (Department of History, Office of the Dean of Arts and Sciences, Office of the Provost, The Graduate School, Triangle Institute for Security Studies, Vice Provost for International Affairs, Center for International Studies, Women's Studies)

in cooperation with:

- **Kings College London, Department of War Studies**
- **NBI Project Group:** "Nations, Border, Identities: The Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars in European Experiences and Memories" (FU Berlin and York University)
- **The French Consulate in Atlanta**
- **The Louis Round Wilson Library, UNC Chapel Hill**

Main Organizer

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